

Whaley House  
2482 San Diego Avenue  
Old Town San Diego, San Diego County  
California

HABS No. CAL-422

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction  
1000 Geary Street  
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT  
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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WHALEY HOUSE

Old Town San Diego, San Diego County, California

ADDRESS: 2482 San Diego Avenue

OWNER: San Diego County

OCCUPANT: Historical Shrine Foundation of San Diego  
County leases and operates the Whaley House  
under contract with the County of San Diego

USE: Historical House Museum

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Waley House built in 1856 shows influence of the Greek Revival with resulting elegance. It was built to serve as a home and as a store. The house was built of brick made with a Veralen patent horsepower brick making machine at a brick yard near by, owned by Whaley. The Whaley House is California State Monument Number 65.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Thomas Whaley was the seventh of ten children whose grandfathers, Thomas Waley Senior and William Pye, were both successful manufacturers in hardware (including guns, locks, engineering instruments, etc.) in the area of New York.

Young Whaley was well equipped to be a leading citizen in his community: a businessman, merchant, architect, mechanic and public servant, including President of the Board of Trustees of the City of San Diego.

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Well educated in this country, he spent two years of travel and study in Europe under the guidance of a tutor. Upon his return from Europe he managed his deceased father's business affairs and rental properties for his mother. Difficulties arising out of the settlement of the estate concerning the locksmith business caused him to start on his own career and to accept an offer with Sutton and Company, a ship building firm.

But in 1848 a tea caddy filled with gold nuggets from California was presented to President Polk, this setting rumors flying and soon one of the men in the office, George S. Wardel, wishing to expand the operations of the firm to San Francisco made Whaley an offer of an opportunity, transportation and possibly a partnership.

Whaley thought that he must see this exciting and wonderful land and on the first of January 1849 boarded the "Sutton" for what proved to be an eventfull and harassing two hundred and four day journey to San Francisco by way of the horn.

In this raw and temporarily mad settlement, Whaley moved into a store on Montgomery Street and proceeded to carry out his assignment with George Wardel, which called for the disposal of the consignment for which he would receive \$600 per month. He had his own stock of hardware and a consignment of miners equipment from Flintoff and Company which he would dispose of at a 10% commission. The operations were successful and he bought his own store on Montgomery Street and continued to expand, including investing with the Franklin Brothers, Lewis and Maurice.

But on May 3rd and 4th 1851, an incendiary fire broke out and devastated twenty central blocks of the city, including Whaley's development worth \$10,000. Later he heard that one of his partners, Lewis Franklin, had done well in San Diego. He decided to go to San Diego and to continue in business.

By October 4th, he had arrived in San Diego, found that Franklin had set up a neat two story building serving as a store and residence; it was the best in town. The dwelling part of the house was comfortable and he was content with more personal comfort than ever before. He thought the climate in San Diego like that in Italy. He wrote that San Diego was "A small Spanish town about 250 or 300 inhabitants, situated from La Playa (the beach) where there was a small settlement of 50 or 100 persons. In the opposite direction, about five miles, a settlement called New Town with 100 inhabitants. And in Old Town where he resided were 6 or 8 stores, 2 hotels, an apothecary shop,

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kept by an old friend from New York, Dr. Painter (the only physician) and three lawyers. The only place of worship, temporarily, was in the house of one of the citizens."

Lewis Franklin and his brother Maurice took over the Exchange Hotel, rebuilt it and opened it as the Franklin House with a billiard saloon, gilt mirrors and flourish. Lewis Franklin no longer practiced law; his health none too good, he soon sold out to Whaley. The Tienda General also did well during this period. Sales averaging over \$150 a day, and increasing activity demanded 18 hours a day out of 24, but resulted in a profit that year of \$18,600. The stock in the store was valued at \$10,000, which Whaley owned outright. He now was in a position to go back East and claim his bride. His friends, Ephraim Morse and Charles Pool, made arrangements for him to bring back their wives. Both Morse and Pool were looking for houses that would accommodate the three families. The only place available was Bandini's Hotel (the Gila House) which they hoped would be comfortable. Morse had made arrangements with Howcs and Company for the purchase of parlor, bedroom, dining room and other furniture. Some of the things were to come from New York and the rest from San Francisco.

Thomas Whaley and Ana Eloise De Lannay were married at the Church of the Ascension in New York City on August 14, 1853. Whaley brought the ladies safely through the trial of the California trip; the families settling at the Gila House.

During the 1850's there was something like a reign of terror in Old Town, due to the lawless acts of Indians. Stabbing affrays were nightly occurrences which aroused the indignation of Editor Ames of the Herald.

Shortly before the birth of their first child, the family moved to the Burkhardt house on Juan Street, opposite the Tienda General. A boy named after Whaley's partner, Francis Hinton, was born December 28, 1854. Whaley had already purchased, from the Turstees of San Diego, his La Playa lots (a total of six - fifty varas square) for \$237. On September 25, 1855, the minutes of the Common Council recorded another purchase of nine lots, totalling about  $8\frac{1}{2}$  acres in Old Town, for \$302.

The New Brick House. In a letter to his mother on May 6, 1856 Whaley wrote "I have a fine lot  $150 \times 217\frac{1}{2}$  which I shall enclose with a wall sometime this year. I am now building a grainary of brick which will hold 3 or 400,000 pounds of grain. I shall put up sheds for hay, a house and a store of brick."

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"My parlor is furnished with Brussels carpet and mahogany and rosewood, a mahogany crib for little Frank. We frequently have musical soirees and our house is the resort of most of the best people in the place."

In September 1856, Whaley reported considerable progress: "I have commenced erecting a two story building 32 x 44 to serve as a house and a store. It is to be completed by May 1858, as my lease expires by then. I feel I will have the nicest place in San Diego. It will cost several thousand dollars, but I have the bricks and will pay for the labor in store trade. I must wait patiently until it is known that this is to be the terminus of the railroad. I feel that San Diego with its climate and bay can become a teeming metropolis. It has the same possibilities as New York."

He wrote on February 9, 1857: "My new house and store will soon be completed, and when finished will be the handsomest and most convenient and comfortable place in this section of the country or within 150 miles of here. It will cost over \$10,000, but I am determined to have a comfortable home for myself and my family. I shall realize a handsome profit from what I invested in the brick business."

The house Whaley erected faced San Diego Avenue. The front consisted of five pairs of doors set close together, each with wood panels about three feet high. The upper part was made of window panes, each about a foot high, and set in sashes in groups of two. These extended to the top of the doors which reached nearly to the twelve-foot ceiling. The plan was to combine living quarters with the store, but it proved to be too far away from the plaza, and by 1858 he had relocated his store in the Robinson House. Meanwhile, a second child, Thomas Whaley, Jr., had been born in August of 1856 at the Burkhardt House. Several plans of the house drawn during the period 1856-68 indicate it was changed considerably. Later on, Frank Whaley made additional changes to the interior.

The downstairs portion of the house was divided into three large rooms, which extended to the back of the house. The granary was then a separate building with a loading platform and no front windows. Two small windows on either side were the only means of ventilation at this early date. (One of these windows was discovered during reconstruction) A drawing of 1862 made by Whaley's business manager, August Ainsworth, shows the granary. A covered veranda extends the full length of the front of the house. Five pairs of French windows were built into the front upper story of the main building. All the hardware came from Waley and Pye establishment; much of it was marked with the initials

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of the firm. An adobe wall, about 7 feet high, surrounded the entire lot. Ana Amelia Whaley was born in the house on June 27, 1858.

A disastrous fire in his store on the plaza, the death of the Waley's second child and discouragement caused Whaley to decide to leave San Diego and return to San Francisco. By March 31, 1859, Thomas Whaley had received an appointment as Commissary Storekeeper, United States Army, under Captain M. D. L. Simpson. He later served as issuing clerk under Captain Sawyer. On July 31, 1867, the Office of Quartermaster, San Francisco, issued orders for him to proceed to Sitka, Alaska Territory. The rest of the family remained in San Francisco.

During Whaley's absence from San Diego, a Mr. Augustus S. Ainsworth was engaged to take care of business affairs there. Ainsworth reported several earthquakes and sent a sketch indicating some damage to the buildings.

When the family returned from San Francisco, Whaley began to remodel the house completely. Repairs were needed in the front, and the interior required remodeling to accomodate the three more children in the Whaley household: George Hay Ringold, November 5, 1860; Violet Eloise, October 4, 1862; Corinne Lillian, September 4, 1864.

Lillian Whaley's earliest recollections were of the steamer trip on the "Orizaba" to San Diego, and the Captain lifting her over the side of the ship. "We were taken to that big room, afterwards used as the court room," she said. "My father was altering the other part of the house at the time. He was putting in a lath and plaster partition making a hallway through the middle of the house. The whole front was open. The arch which stands between the parlors was in place. The rooms were furnished with damask drapes (rose) and ingrain body Brussels carpet figured also in rose. Materials for the drapes had belonged to Grandma Whaley. They looked warm, comfortable and inviting. The parlors were the reception rooms for all the balls held here, the dancing being in the big room. To reach it, one had to go to a door in the back parlor (study) which led into the hall (the front parlor had none) then through the hall to the front porch and so on into the ball room. The kitchen was a lean-to built of the back porch connected with the dining room through the window. The present kitchen was then the dining room. A pantry separated the dining room from a large front room which we called the office. The same room was used as the headquarters for General Thomas Sedgewick during the railroad development and for many other purposes.

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"The large room to the north, called the big room by the family and the annex by others, has been used for a number of purposes. It was the County Court Room in 1869-70, the county records being kept upstairs in the main building. The furniture consisted of a circular railing almost the width of the room, back of which was the chair of the judge on a raised platform. A canopy hung at the back of the chair on the wall.

"The furniture consisted of chairs and benches. Thomas H. Bush was one of the first judges. Juries were locked up in the room. Political meetings were held here. Later it was used as a court room by Edward H. Burr and Francis Whaley. It also has been used as a billiard room, dairy, kindergarten, Sunday school, store and residence."

On November 1, 1868 Thomas Whaley leased the second floor of his house and the use of the corral to Thomas W. Tanner for \$20 gold coin. Tanner received permission to remove 12 feet of studding on the second floor, commencing at the east brick wall of the house for the purpose of making an exhibition room. A portion of the east end railing of the balcony was also removed for the purpose of erecting stairs thereto, for theatrical productions.

Following the Tanner Troupe's occupancy of the house, Whaley inserted an advertisement: "To Capitalists: My house for sale." During this period the Board of Trustees met in the court room.

On August 12, 1869, the county leased the building for a court room for two years at \$65 per month. The lease permitted the county the use of the big room and three upstairs rooms for the storage of county records. Whaley had put up a dias and railing at the north end of the room.

Population conditions, at this time, were pointing more and more toward definite political rivalry between Old and New Town. Through 1869 Old Towners expressed bitter antagonism toward their rivals to the south. The general feeling was that the settlement would soon come to grief and be abandoned, as was the fate of the settlement in 1850.

As New Town became more outspoken in demanding the removal of county offices and records to a central location, definite party politics developed. The battle (almost) between Old Town and New Town raged through the courts in late 1870 and early 1871. Finally on March 31 of that year the records and archives of San Diego were quietly moved to New Town.

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Thomas Whaley and his business partner Philip Crosthwaite moved to New Town, feeling that it would be the city of the future. But their enterprise did not prosper. Whaley was called back to New York to settle his father's estate and did not return to San Diego until 1879.

The tired old house, many-hued in ruin, stood through the years, slowly rotting, farther from the changing river bed than in its youth. Now it was deserted, its records mostly forgotten; but it spoke of a distinctive people, uniquely classical architecture, and a way of life of a century ago. Even in ruin it was beautiful.

Admirers of the house borrowed money and saved it from destruction by a narrow margin. Its devoted sponsors then went about the heart breaking task of trying to raise funds to restore and preserve it as a living memento to San Diego's lusty youth.

In 1956, the Board of Supervisors of the County of San Diego agreed to purchase and restore it to its original condition. The County Operations Department conducted the restoration in a cautious and deliberate fashion. The County workmen provided a sound foundation, and then "scalped" the inside courses of brick from the structure. Bricks which were sound were used for exterior patching. Steel reinforcing and concrete were applied from the inside. Today the Whaley House is in effect a reinforced concrete structure with a brick outer facing. Rotted and termite-riddled wood was ripped away, and structural members were replaced with new, chemically-treated wood. Mouldings and trim were carefully preserved for future use. That which was too far gone was faithfully reproduced.

#### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

An early photograph (1865) shows the front elevation of the building in pleasing proportions and consisting of a two story portion with five tall openings symmetrically spaced on each floor. On the lower floor there were four windows and a central door. The upper floor had five shuttered windows. Across the front was a one story portico on a two or three step base supporting four square wood columns, with moulded base and cap, carrying a simple entablature. The railing consisted of a hand rail carried on turned balusters with square corner and intermediate posts.

The one story portion (Big Room or Granary) extends the front wall and portico to the left side and shows two tall windows symmetrically placed each side of a central door. The portico posts are made of two



narrow pieces of wood on a wood base block, a mid height wood spacer and a wood block cap, surmounted by a moulded cornice, all are related to the main portico. At the top of the two story facade, there is a cornice (probably wood) the full width, and below each end there is a leader head and down spout.

Over the two story portion there is a flat roof with a brick parapet. Over the one story portion there is a gable roof of about 8 in 12 pitch, which sweeps down to the front portico and to a rear porch. Both the one and two story parts are combined into one brick structure. (Note: the porches mentioned are relatively low pitch-roofs, shingled at the rear, composition on the portico) Granary roof - originally thatch; wood shingle 1858-60. Flat roofs and rear porch had Brea tar roofing.

#### EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - Two story portion 32'-6" x 44'-6". One story wing 30'-11" x 27'-1".

Foundation and Wall Construction - The original foundation was about 18" deep and formed by spreading the brick footing to about 24".

The brick walls of the two story portion were 12" thick to 12'-0" height and 8" thick to 20'-0". (at parapet)

The brick walls of the one story portion were 8" thick and about 10'-0" high at the plate.

Porches - The porch at the front of the building consists of a continuous wood floor about 8'-0" wide and 63'-5" long with two risers at each end from the grade level.

Fireplaces - The three fireplaces are built of brick on the two exterior end walls of the two story structure and cause no break on the exterior. The extra depth is provided as a chimney breast.

The downstairs fireplace has a 1" x 8" shelf carried on a 3" x 3" horizontal member supported by turned spindles (from 3" x 3" stock). Near the ends the mantel shelf is carried on scrolled brackets 1" thick and 8" high, projecting 3½". The surround of the fireplace opening is 9" wide and formed by two moulds, each ¾" x 1-3/8". The space between and the 4½" space above is the same plastered surface as the chimney breast.

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The fireplace in the front bedroom upstairs has a similar opening, about 3'-0" wide by about 2'-6" high, with a hearth raised about 3/4" above the wood floor. This fireplace has a narrow stone surround with wood pilasters at the sides carrying a wide board topped by a moulding supporting the approximately 2" thick mantel shelf. A third fireplace is in the rear bedroom, second floor.

Doorways and Openings -

Main front door - pair, 2'-6" x 7'-6" x 1-3/4", wood muntins, no glass, combined with a 1-3/8" matching panel carrying glass, total thickness 2-1/8". Three light transom over door.

Door, stair hall to rear entrance - pair, 1'-8" x 7'-6", raised panel - glazed transom.

Door, to front of the one story - pair, 2'-1" x 8'-10", raised panel.

Door, to rear, - pair, 2'-10" x 7'-2", raised panel.

Door, from kitchen to porch - 2'-0" x 5'-10".

The second floor door at the rear has been added recently for a fire escape. There is an access panel through the brick gable end of the one story portion. It is built of wood and about 2'-0" x 5'-0".

Windows -

Front, first floor one story wing - two double hung 3'-3" x 5'-11", four light, with louvered shutters.

Front, first floor two story part - two double hung 5'-0" x 7'-6", with louvered shutters. (Four light)

Second floor - three windows symmetrically placed over the openings below, about 3'-0" x 6'-8", double hung, four light, with louvered shutters.

INTERIOR

The ground floor was arranged with a central entrance hall extending straight through to the rear and toward the rear a straight run of stairs rises toward the front.

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To the right of this hall when entering, there is the living room connecting through an arch to a parlor, and in turn through a door to a study, with doors from each of the three rooms to the hall.

The dining room is to the left of the hall with the big room (old granary) entered through a door on the opposite wall. From the dining room, one passes through a pantry to the kitchen and through another door back to the foot of the stairs in the hall.

On the second floor, there are three large rooms and two small rooms with auxiliary rooms.

Stairway - The traditional open string stairway rises about 11'-0" in a straight run of 17 risers. A hand rail rising from a nicely turned newel post is carried on turned ballusters to the second floor, with a 12" radius return, connecting to a balcony hand rail of the same design.

Flooring - T&G wood floors originally were carried on floor joists let into the brick walls but now are carried on ledgers provided in the reconstruction. Now, there is 1" x 4" flooring exposed in the big room on the first floor and random width pegged plank flooring in the upper front room, but most of the rooms, halls and stairs, are carpeted.

Wall and Ceiling Finish - The walls throughout the building are plastered. Lime plaster and mortar was locally processed from sea shells. The ceilings throughout are plastered and in the main rooms chandeliers hang from a moulded circular medallion.

Doors - The interior doors are typical four panel with raised moulding rails and stiles 4", lock rail 8", bottom rail 11" and varying in width. The typical door 2'-10" x 6'-8".

Trim - The original trim, together with the doors windows and stair woodwork, is reminiscent of the millwork of those early days. The base, wood, 11" x 1", with 1" x  $\frac{1}{2}$ " show mould. The moulded door casing has an unusual bevel where the outer projecting mould joins the plane surface. The mould projects 1- $\frac{3}{4}$ ", with a total width of 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". The arch has a different casing, the mould projecting 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ " and a total width of 6". The mould is of a conventional profile without the bevel. The casing of the double hung windows has the mould with the bevel but projecting only 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " and with a total width of 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". A picture mould 3/4" x 2" is used generally throughout the interior. Trim was white cedar brought around Cape Horn.

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Hardware - All of the hardware came from the Whaley and Pye establishment in the New York area. Much of it was marked with the initials of the firm. Iron hdw. Ex. dr. - 3 butts fixed pin; rim lock, porc. knob. Int. dr. - 2 butts, mortice lock, porc. knob.

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Prepared by,

*Wm. H. Porter*

William H. Porter, AIA  
San Diego Preservation Officer

July 1963

APPROVED:

*Charles S. Pope*

DATE: *September 10, 1963*

Charles S. Pope, AIA  
Supervising Architect, Historic Structures  
Western Office, Design and Construction  
National Park Service